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California congressman introduces
new nanotech bill in U.S. House

By Sally Richards

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Oct. 18, 2002 – U.S. [Rep. Mike Honda](#) (D-Calif.), on Wednesday introduced a bill in the House that attempts to ensure nanotechnology has the support to continue to grow.

The proposal came even as another prominent congressman vowed to introduce nanotechnology legislation to serve as a companion to a bill passed by the Senate Commerce Committee last month.

Honda's bill, the Nanoscience and Nanotechnology Advisory Board Act of 2002, would establish a nongovernmental advisory board to monitor and influence the [National Nanotechnology Initiative](#) and government agencies doing nanotechnology research. Honda is currently looking to nanotechnology corporate leaders and scientists to join forces to create the board.

"Research on nanotechnology will give rise to a host of novel social, ethical, philosophical and legal issues," Honda said in a news release. "To appropriately address these issues will require guidance that is responsive to the realities of the science, as well as additional research to predict, understand, and alleviate anticipated problems. The advisory board created by my legislation will provide this much needed expertise to policymakers and will set clear goals objectives and metrics to really understand our country's progress."

Honda's bill was referred to the House Science Committee. Heidi Tringe, a spokeswoman for the committee chairman, [Rep. Sherwood Boehlert](#), (R-NY), said Boehlert himself is "committed" to introducing a nanotechnology bill that is comparable to a [bill introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden](#), (D-Ore.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology and Space.

Honda said he is currently looking to nanotech business leaders and scientists for input. Among them is Norm Wu, managing director of [Alameda Capital](#), who was asked by Honda's staff to review the bill.

Wu praised Honda's proposal, saying it will bring together experts who represent different facets of nanotechnology under one central board

"I've spent a lot of time in Japan, and that country has made nanotechnology one of its top four of its science and technology initiatives," Wu said. "You read almost every day one story about nanotechnology in the mainstream press, and so the everyday person walking the streets is somewhat educated about the science. That awareness has made corporations much more aggressive in their nanotechnology investments."

Wu said his firm will start to invest in nanotechnology companies early next year.

Meyya Meyyappan, director of the [Center for Nanotechnology](#) at the NASA Ames Research Center, called Honda's proposed legislation "a step in the right direction." Meyyappan said he would like to sit on the board, but he's disqualified because he's a government employee.

"They will find excellent people in the science and business to sit on the board and it will be a very positive addition to move nanotechnology forward," Meyyappan said.

"I think Honda's bill will pass, because when all is said and done, the House committees may discuss hundreds of things, and disagree on many, but this country's economic base is built upon technology and has been for hundreds of years. How can anyone argue about that?"

It was unclear Thursday evening how Honda's bill would work with any bill Boehlert might introduce. Honda's call for the development of an outside nanotechnology advisory is one piece of Wyden's much more sweeping legislation.

Wyden's 21st Century Nanotechnology Research and Development Act would create a National Nanotechnology Research Program; form a Presidential National Nanotechnology Advisory Panel; establish a National Nanotechnology Coordination Office, which would provide administrative and technical support for the Advisory Panel and the Council; and launch a new Center for Societal, Ethical, Educational, Legal, and Workforce Issues Related to Nanotechnology.

In essence, the bill would give the existing National Nanotechnology Initiative much more heft and security than it enjoys now. The NNI in its current state exists at the whim of the president and does not have its own dedicated staff or budget.

Joining Wyden in introducing the bill were Sens. George Allen (R-Va.), Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.), and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.).

The bill passed easily through the Commerce Committee and awaits consideration by the full Senate. Given the tight schedule of the Senate between now and the end of the year, it's unlikely – though possible – the full Senate would consider Wyden's bill in this session.

Tringe said the situation in the House is similar.

Honda's spokesman, Rubin Pulido Jr., is inviting experts in the field to e-mail or call him, at 202-225-2631, if they if they wish to be considered for the board.

(Small Times Correspondent Doug Brown in Washington contributed to this report).



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